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**Social integration of people with disabilities: the development of an
information technology model based on personal growth and achievement**

John A.M. Earls
University of Wollongong

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**SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
– THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY MODEL BASED ON PERSONAL
GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

John A. M. Earls, M.Ed.

Department of Business Systems

1990

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

17.05.90

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the use of a computer bulletin board as a means of facilitating the social integration of people with disabilities.

The literature review identifies significant parallel research strands in the

- Social Integration of People with Disabilities
- Social Psychology of Information Technology.

To develop a model which draws these important strands together three groups interact using a computer bulletin board. The groups are people with disabilities, tertiary computing students and speech and occupational therapists. The study conducts pre, post and long term attitude tests, collects data via the operating system, records all textual data generated over a three month period (almost 6000 pages) and ultimately carries out longitudinal case studies with the disabled participants.

The short term (three months) attitude changes are inconclusive, but the longer term (two year) changes show a highly significant improvement in the attitude of people with disabilities who participated. The case studies showed that all participants with disabilities had improved their self image, their confidence and had made identifiable integrative gains. These included becoming politically active, living independently, gaining employment for

over fifty percent of those involved, publishing literary works and taking up further study. In addition the clearly demonstrated benefits evoked very positive changes in their peer group, in structural changes within the organisation, in Federal Government Department of Community Services and Health service delivery and in the provision of an "Access Australia" innovative award to the Redcliffe City Municipal Library.

Grounded Theory was used to identify a range of factors which supported or inhibited the Integrative process.

The study demonstrated the value of integrating the two research streams, the benefits of the process (with minimal disadvantages) and the efficacy of the model.

A significant issue emerging was the need for people with disabilities to be empowered, able to make their own choices and develop their own models. As a consequence the study concluded by outlining relevant areas of suggested future development in the mainstream and producing a skeletal model as a basis for future integrative work involving the participants themselves.

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